

Testimony of
Justin (Judge) Jessop
Before the
House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management
Public Field Hearing to Review Federal Farm Policy
July 31, 2006

Good morning, I am Judge Jessop, a grasslands producer from Presho, South Dakota. My wife, Lisa, and I raise our two children, cow-calf pairs and some yearlings on 1,400 acres of leased private land in south central South Dakota. We are fortunate to live close to my parents and brothers so that I can help one of my brothers custom graze 2,500 yearlings on 5,500 acres.

In addition to our cow-calf production, I am also a technical consultant to other grasslands producers. The first thing I do when I arrive at a producer's place is to ask "What are your goals, where do you want to be, and what are you willing to change?" Ninety percent of the time they ask for technical assistance both for production and environmental benefits; cost-share is secondary to their need for information. These days, they want water development and then grazing techniques to improve production and grass quality.

I understand where they are coming from. When I first started participating in USDA conservation programs, I had already decided I wanted to improve my grazing management and had started fencing on my own but I needed help with water. I sat down with the NRCS staff to learn about my options. When I went into the office I was not thinking about which cost-share program to sign up for but more for the advice they could offer. Today, I am involved in an EQIP contract, a CRP contract and a GRP contract, so I think I understand the conservation programs.

I've found these conservation programs help improve my production about twenty percent. They also help my landlord and me manage our risk. The financial incentives help me make my annual payments. In years like this when it is droughty, it also helps because we know there is a safety net there when de-stocking is our only option. I am able to keep my cattle longer because I have reliable water sources and my grass is healthier and able to last longer than if I did not have a grazing plan. If this was a shorter drought, I could outlast it through what I've implemented. I know I'm not the only producer who has learned this. Because USDA provided technical assistance the past sixty years, we are not in a dust bowl during this drought.

The Grasslands Reserve Program (or GRP) could be a great program if properly funded and authorized. In the three years South Dakota was able to offer the program, I know there were over 1,200 applications and the NRCS was able to fund only 20 to 25 of them. The interest is there and they are from good applicants who could really use the program. I enrolled 350 acres in Lyman County for GRP which pays about \$10 per acre.

One thousand acres of my operation are enrolled at about \$30 per acre in the Conservation Reserve Program. They are due to expire in 2007 but were extended to 2010. When it does expire, my landlord and I would like to keep the land in grass. Economic conditions will

determine if I have to break it again. We would be interested in enrolling it in the GRP if that program was available for expiring CRP.

Since my EQIP contract started in 2003, I've installed pipeline and cross-fencing, all to improve my grazing management and protect the land. In addition to our improved grass and livestock production, we are seeing more wildlife, including pheasants and a doe and fawn who have moved onto our property.

As I've stated before, the cost-share and financial incentives help but I find most producers think the technical assistance is the most help. They realize they need to take "baby steps" as they work up to implementing their grazing management system and the financial assistance comes next. Through my consultant work, I help organize educational opportunities for producers to learn more about proper grassland management techniques. South Dakota NRCS, US Fish & Wildlife Service and South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks strongly support our efforts to find out what works in different parts of the state and maybe I or another producer can use that information or share it with someone else.

It doesn't make sense to me that we have some conservation programs established and "conservation" is supposed to be an important feature of the Farm Bill, but we have commodity programs that encourage record sod busting in parts of the state. I encourage you to look at US Fish & Wildlife Service's "thunderstorm" map of north central South Dakota to see the grasslands being broken in the heart of our prairie pothole region - all to receive commodity payments and LDPs. Fifty-six thousand acres of grass have been converted to cropland in a five county area. Maybe if USDA were able to expand programs like the GRP, then producers would not feel forced to give up their grass. Our local bankers and loan officers influence our conservation program choices and livestock doesn't benefit under commodity programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before your subcommittee. While there are some problems, we have some good programs in place and I encourage you to keep that in mind as you build the next Farm Bill. It's important we all recognize that what happens here on the land will affect those downstream and those who eat, wear, and consume what we produce. I want the opportunity for my children to be able to continue our family's legacy. Like most producers, I want the land to be better than when I received it.

**Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required from Non-governmental Witnesses**

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Justin (Judge) Jessop
2. Business/Address: 24690 299th Avenue
Presho, SD 57568
3. Business Phone Number: 605-280-0127
4. Organization you represent: Self
5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:
I am Grasslands producer, raising cow-calf pairs and some yearlings
I participate in USDA conservation programs, holding CRP, GRP, & EQIP contracts
I am a technical consultant advising other grasslands producers in South Dakota
6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:
I've attended classes on Holistic Resources Management and the "Low Cost Cow-Calf School"; I organize educational opportunities for producers to learn more about proper grassland management techniques for economic & environmental efficiencies.
7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:
Not Applicable

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witnesses Disclosure Form

House Rules* require non-governmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2004.

Name: Justin (Judge) Jessop
Address: 24690 299th Avenue; Presho, SD 57568
Telephone: 605-280-0127
Organization you represent (if any): NONE

1. Please list any federal grants of contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require the disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: Not Applicable Amount:

Source: _____ Amount:

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: Not Applicable Amount:

Source: _____ Amount:

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: XX

Signature:

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each subcommittee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.